



U.S. Forest Service - Eldorado National Forest

South Fork American River Watershed

Cohesive Strategy / Large Landscape Project

Date: December 16, 2015

Background:

In August 2014, the Eldorado National Forest was one of two forests in California selected to begin implementation of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy. This is a response to congressional direction in the 2009 FLAME ACT for land management agencies to address fire management challenges on a larger scale by working collaboratively among all stakeholders and across all landscapes, using best science to achieve three goals:

1. Resilient Landscapes
2. Fire Adapted Communities
3. Safe & Effective Wildfire Response

The South Fork American River (SOFAR) Watershed was proposed for implementing the cohesive strategy because of the many values at risk threatened by complex fire issues associated with drought, climate change, fuel loading, insects and disease. Communities, infrastructure, private timber, water, power, recreation, protected species, and fire frequency are all reasons that this watershed is a high priority for collaborative action.

A few months earlier, in May 2014, most of the National Forest System (NFS) Lands in the SOFAR Watershed had been designated as Insect and Disease Treatment Areas under the 2014 Farm Bill which amended the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003. This designation was requested by the Governor of California, and authorized by the Chief of the U.S. Forest Service. Additional Insect and Disease Treatment Areas within SOFAR were designated in 2015.

There have been five large fires in the SOFAR watershed in last 40 years which will inform the development of a cohesive strategy — Pilliken Fire (1973), Wrights Fire (1981), Cleveland Fire (1992), Freds Fire (2004) and the King Fire (2014).

SOFAR Cohesive Strategy Project Area Description - The SOFAR Cohesive Strategy project area is approximately 410,000 acres, including approximately 250,000 acres of the Eldorado National Forest. The project area includes the upper 75% of the South Fork of the American River Watershed, 50% of the King Fire burned area, and 49 miles of the Highway 50 corridor. The western boundary of the project area is defined by Highway 193 and Highway 49. (See Map 1)

SOFAR Insect & Disease Designated Areas - Fourteen sub-watersheds within SOFAR, including 188,489 acres on the Eldorado National Forest, were designated as Insect and Disease Treatment Areas in 2014. Three more SOFAR sub-watersheds were designated in 2015, including another 37,055 acres on the Eldorado National Forest. The Insect and Disease designations within SOFAR are primarily based on the risk of substantial tree mortality over the next 15 years as determined by stand density and other factors. Tree mortality is not extensive at this time. Actions to increase resilience to insects and disease are needed to prevent the widespread mortality that is occurring in other forests. The 2014 Farm Bill authorizes expedited environmental review for insect and disease treatments on up to 3,000 acres for projects in designated areas that are developed through a collaborative process. (See Map 2)

USFS Funding Allocations to Date:

- FY14 - Wildland Fire Hazardous Fuels (WFHF): \$625K
- FY15 - Wildland Fire Hazardous Fuels (WFHF): \$500K
- FY15 - Restoration of Forest Lands and Improvements (RIRI): \$2.6M

Current Project Collaboration:

Fire Adapted Communities - Key Projects: Fire Adapted 50, Roadrunner

- USFS and CAL FIRE have developed a plan called Fire Adapted 50 which will focus on the Fire Adapted Communities component of the cohesive strategy. Fire Adapted 50 includes a series of projects which will strengthen and expand existing fuel breaks in the most heavily developed part of the watershed along the Highway 50 corridor.
- Through a partnership with the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians, fuel was removed from King Fire contingency lines in preparation for a future Camino / Pollock Pines fuel break which is part of Fire Adapted 50.
- Work is in progress on the Roadrunner Project under a cooperative agreement with the California Conservation Corps (CCC). This wildland-urban interface project includes the Strawberry Fuel Break and Silver Fork Road Fuel Break which will reduce fuel around the communities of Silver Fork, Kyburz, and Strawberry. The Silver Fork Road Fuel Break was completed with approximately 64 acres of mechanical thinning. Fuels reduction on federal land around the community of Strawberry is ongoing. These treatments extend Fire Adapted 50 farther east along the Highway 50 corridor.

Resilient Landscapes - Key Projects: King Fire Restoration, Cleveland / Icehouse Plantation Thinning, Pillikin Plantation Thinning, Caples Prescribed Fire / Ecological Restoration

- The King Fire Restoration Project Record of Decision selected Modified Alternative 2 which includes 6,307 acres of treatment in the SOFAR Watershed including salvage, hazard tree removal, fuel reduction, sensitive watershed protection, and reforestation treatments. This decision was based on extensive stakeholder involvement.
- Environmental analysis and stakeholder engagement is underway for the Cleveland/Icehouse and Pillikin Plantation Thinning projects. These projects will utilize the categorical exclusion authority provided under the 2014 Farm Bill for insect and disease treatments on multiple units.
- Environmental analysis and stakeholder engagement is in progress for the Caples Prescribed Fire / Ecological Restoration Project, which is an approximately 10,000 acre project area. This project will utilize the categorical exclusion authority for wildlife habitat improvement.

Safe and Effective Response - Key Projects: Fire Detection Camera System, Big Hill Roadside Brushing, Road Reconstruction (Peavine/Bryant, Granite Springs, and Weber Mill Roads)

- Fire detection cameras were purchased for deployment at several locations to enhance initial attack efficiency and effectiveness. This expands on an existing camera system in the Tahoe Basin in partnership with the University of Nevada / Reno.
- Under a cooperative agreement with BIA, the Mooretown Rancheria Brush Crew completed 3.5 miles of roadside brushing south of Big Hill, a critical corridor for suppression operations associated with the Big Hill Fire Lookout and Big Hill Heliport. Several other important fire access roads were also treated.
- A road reconstruction contract was completed for the Peavine/Bryant Road Project to improve access for land management activities and emergency fire response. Other contracts are being developed for

Granite Springs and Weber Mill roads. Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI) is a key partner in these road projects which also provide access to private timber on SPI lands.

Formal Collaborative Development for Cohesive Strategy:

- Under an interagency agreement with USFS, the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution formed a Technical Evaluation Team (TET) with representatives from 7 stakeholder organizations who reviewed proposals, and made recommendations for hiring a facilitator to assist with developing a collaborative for the SOFAR Cohesive Strategy :
 - El Dorado County Fire Safe Council
 - El Dorado County RCD (Resource Conservation District)
 - El Dorado County Board of Supervisors
 - CAL FIRE
 - Sierra Pacific Industries
 - Sierra Forest Legacy
 - USFS Pacific Southwest Research Station
- The Consensus Building Institute (CBI) has been selected to be the contractor for facilitation services. The contract is being finalized, and a kick-off meeting will be planned for early in 2016. The facilitator will establish a process for engaging stakeholders regarding their interests and values to be protected in the watershed. Up to 30 organizations are expected to be involved. Many other projects are also underway in the SOFAR watershed, led by various stakeholders. The cohesive strategy will interrelate these numerous projects for greater efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability.

Other Planning Accomplishments:

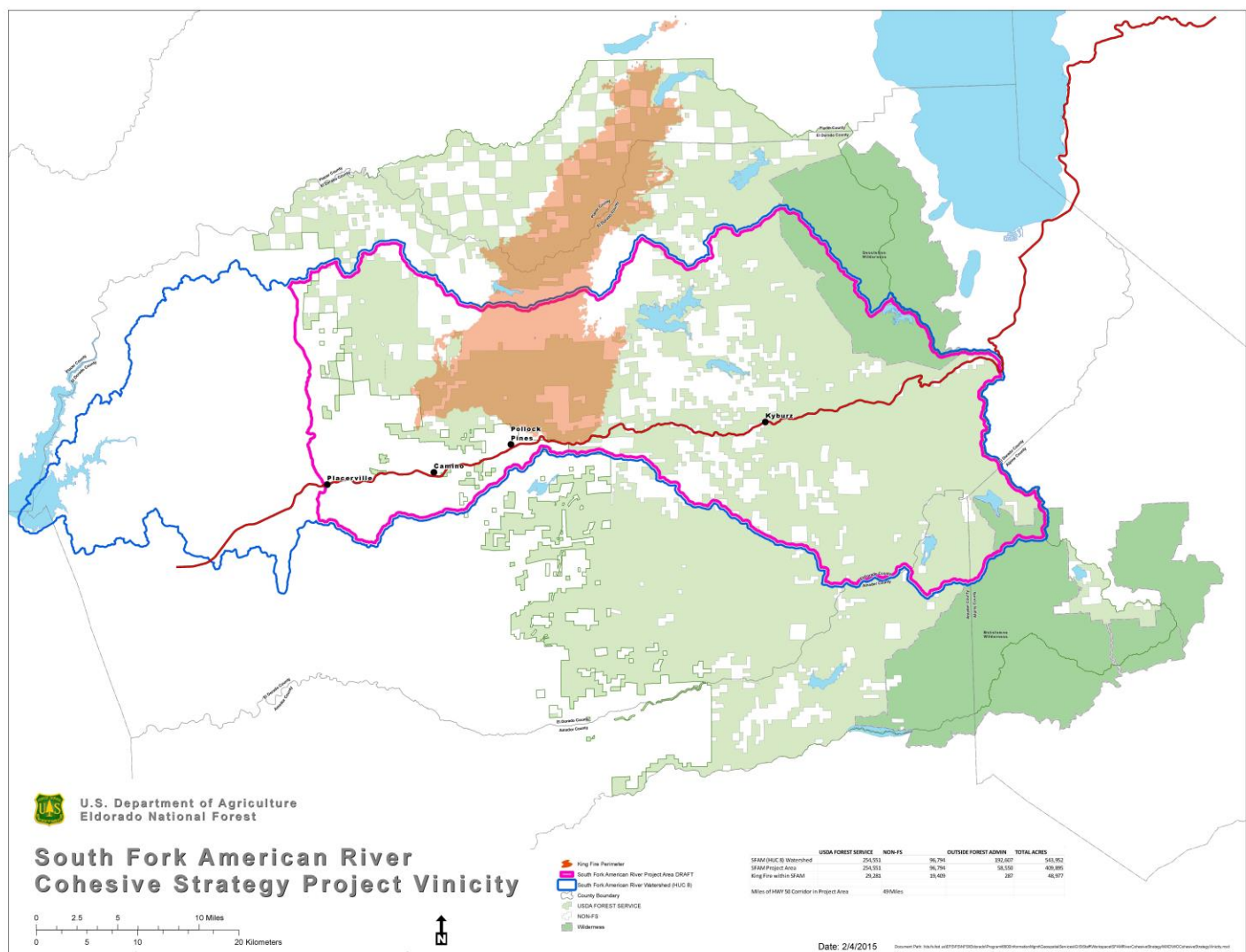
- A draft South Fork American River Wildland Fire Risk Assessment has been completed.
- An interagency agreement was established for forest boundary marking and cadastral surveys to define property lines needed for “All-Lands” project planning and implementation of multijurisdictional projects.

Related Collaboration in the Watershed: The El Dorado County Community Wildfire Protection Plan is currently in the process of being updated.

Major Values at Risk:

- Communities: Placerville, Pollock Pines, Camino, Kyburz, Strawberry, White Hall
- Residences: Primary Homes, Vacation Homes, Private Recreation Cabins
- Timber: Plantations on Public Lands, Private Timber
- Recreation: Trails, Campgrounds, Concessions
- Infrastructure: Administrative Buildings, Communication Towers, Transmission Lines, Highway 50 Transportation Corridor / Gateway to S. Lake Tahoe
- Sensitive Natural Resources: California Spotted Owl PACs (Protected Activity Centers), Old Growth Forest Remnants, Critical Habitat / T&E Species, Class I Airsheds
- Sensitive Cultural Resources: archaeology sites, historic sites and structures
- Water delivery systems: El Dorado Irrigation District, Placer County Water Agency
- Hydroelectric Power Generation Facilities: El Dorado Irrigation District, Sacramento Municipal Utility District

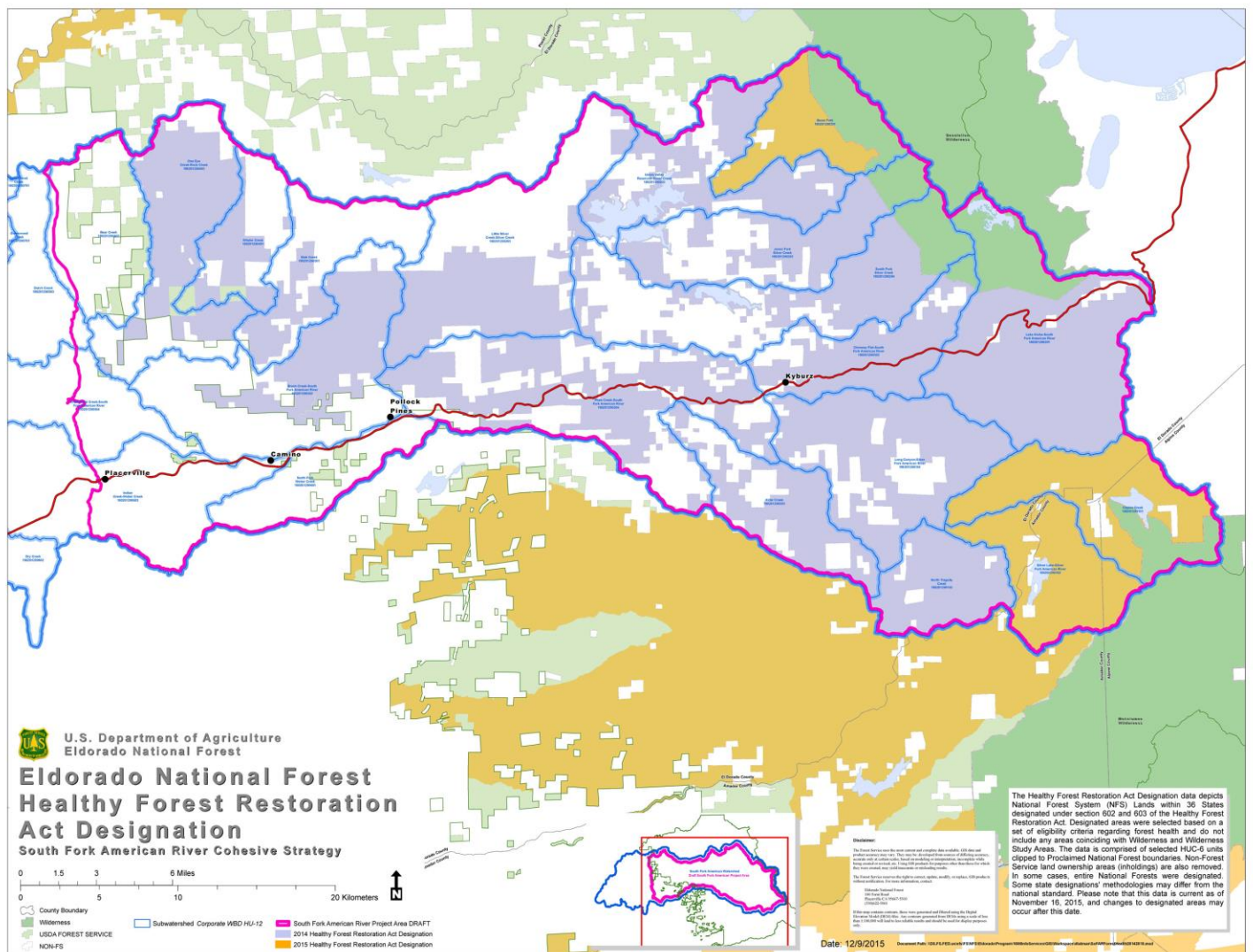
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Map 1 – SOFAR Cohesive Strategy Project Area and 2014 King Fire

Note: King Fire Restoration Project Treatments in Final EIS on NFS Lands in within SOFAR Watershed

| Modified Alternative 2 | Acres |
|------------------------------|--------------|
| Biomass Removal | 1,041 |
| Hand Cut Hazards/Pile | 95 |
| Hand Cut/Pile | 636 |
| Initial Plant and/or Release | 9 |
| Mastication/Hand Cut/Pile | 186 |
| Mastication/Machine Pile | 519 |
| Roadside Salvage | 319 |
| Salvage | 3,351 |
| Watershed Sensitive Area | 150 |
| Total | 6,307 |



Map 2 – Insect and Disease Designated Areas on NFS Lands within SOFAR Cohesive Strategy Project Area

Note:

Blue = 2014 Insect and Disease Designated Areas on NFS Lands

Gold = 2015 Insect and Disease Designated Areas on NFS Lands

Disclaimer for the national dataset:

The Healthy Forest Restoration Act Designation data depicts National Forest System (NFS) Lands within 36 states designated under section 602 and 603 of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act. Designated areas were selected based on a set of eligibility criteria regarding forest health and do not include any areas coinciding with Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas. The data is comprised of selected HUC-6 (also called HU-12) units clipped to Proclaimed National Forest boundaries. Non-Forest Service land ownership areas (inholdings) are also removed. In some cases, entire National Forests were designated. Some state designations methodologies may differ from the national standard. Please note that this data is current as of November 16, 2015, and changes to designated areas may occur after this date.